



HELP

ASK OUR TECHNICAL EXPERTS

HELPFILE

Media Center's EPG doesn't work

Q I've got a new PC with Windows Vista Home Premium. The PC runs great with no problems, except for Media Center's electronic programme guide (EPG). Getting this to work has turned into a marathon operation, with no end in sight.

Running TV Setup seems to work. I've selected UK as my country, location and TV type (Heathfield, Freeview) and entered my postcode. My Terratec dual TV Tuner card is found, and both receivers are recognised and selected. It is when I try to download the EPG that the troubles start. The status bar moves to about 10 per cent and stops after varying amounts of time. I then see the following message:

Guide download error: the guide could not be downloaded for the following reason: Guide Server error (error 21)
Details: File Validation Error – Mismatched Guide Package. Code 21

If I decide to try again, I simply get the same error messages. If, on the other hand, I go on, all the TV channels I would expect are found and tuned in, and all the programmes are viewable with no problems – it's just that the EPG is not working.

A search on Google finds dozens of sites where people are having the same problem. I've tried the suggested fixes, but none of these worked for me. Windows XP Media Center Edition has huge problems with the TV and EPG for which there are countless workarounds. A great attraction of Windows Vista Home Premium is that Media Center is an integral part of the system, but it looks as if the old problems are still around, and previously used solutions don't work.

Any suggestions as to how to fix this problem would be gratefully received.

Ron Howes, rrh.02@tiscali.co.uk

A Lots of Vista Media Center users seem to be having problems updating the programme guide. The error messages are generally unhelpful, and sometimes downright misleading – such as the message that says you haven't got an internet connection when the date and time are wrong. While Error 21 was also common with XP versions of Windows Media Center, the fixes that worked for XP don't seem very useful for most Vista users.

First, have you installed the latest Windows Updates? A new cumulative update package for Windows Vista Media Center was released on 3rd October 2007. This update is called the October 2007 Cumulative Update for Media Center for Windows Vista and is also known as KB941229. Check this is installed. Microsoft did not mark it as 'Critical' so the automatic update won't install it. You have to run Windows Update, select Custom and then select it. Problems with a Windows service

called 'BITS', which is used for various background file downloads, can also cause this error.

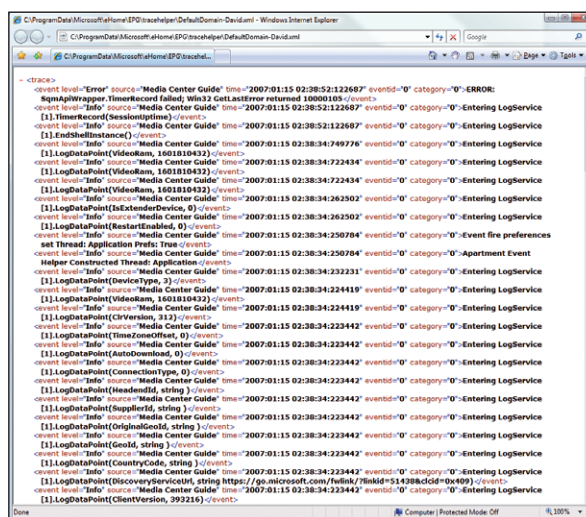
There is a Microsoft Developers Network blog by Aaron Stebner regarding problems with Media Center. A useful article on other errors (mainly with Windows XP) can be found at <http://blogs.msdn.com/astebner/articles/490466.aspx>. This article links to solutions for specific errors, although Error 21 has no real fix there (it just suggests you try the download later).

THE KEY TO IT ALL

To discover clues to the real cause of Error 21, you will need to look in the folder C:\ProgramData\Microsoft\ehome\EPG\tracehelper for a .XML log file. This is a text file with the most recent events listed at the top. If this file mentions a 'decompression error' (this seems to be the most common problem), your problem could be caused by a corrupted or missing RSA encryption key, needed to unlock the guide data. Look in the hidden folder C:\ProgramData\Microsoft\Crypto\RSA and check that it has a folder called MachineKeys. If MachineKeys exists, check its access rights. One common issue is that another Microsoft patch set its parent folder RSA to read-only for everyone, but MachineKeys must have full access for everyone.

If MachineKeys does not exist, create a new MachineKeys folder, then make sure everyone has full access to it. If it existed, and changing permissions did not work, rename the existing MachineKeys folder to MachineKeys.bad before creating a new one. This folder is used by other services, too, so don't delete it. If, after renaming it, the Guide download works, see what files were created in the new folder, then copy all except those files from the old folder to the new one.

Sometimes Microsoft's advice to try again later works. Even after making the fix, it may not work immediately but will work later. This factor may have been the cause of some of the apparently unrelated changes that various people claimed solved the problem for them.



▲ The XML file in the tracehelper folder can help you track down a problem with Media Center's EPG

CONTACTS

PLEASE EMAIL THE RELEVANT DEPARTMENT

helpfile@computershopper.co.uk
for all PC problems

softwarehelp@computershopper.co.uk
for help with software applications

buyinghelp@computershopper.co.uk
for advice on PC purchases

YOU CAN ALSO WRITE TO US AT:

Help
Computer Shopper
30 Cleveland Street
London
W1T 4JD

Struggling with BT Home Hub

Q My partner and I enjoy playing online games and both have a PC. We also have an older PC, which we would like to use as a storage hub for backups. The problem is that when we try to connect both PCs to our BT Home Hub at the same time, it crashes the internet connection.

Is it possible to have a small network, so we both have access to the internet and to the storage hub, but to restrict the connection so that the storage hub doesn't have access to the internet, as this is purely for backups? I have been advised by the technical support team at BT that I can't do this with my current setup. Is what I want to do possible and, if so, how?

Laurence Willis, laurencewillis@btinternet.com

A We can't think why your Home Hub should crash when you connect two PCs. You may want to restart it, and if that does not fix it, then ask BT support.

The Home Hub is an ADSL modem and wireless router with extras such as VoIP built in. You connect computers via wireless, Ethernet or USB cable. There are two Ethernet ports and one USB port (labelled USB-B) that can be used to connect a computer. If you choose to use the USB port, the CD provided with Home Hub should install Windows XP drivers, but for Vista you need to download drivers from BT's website (www.bt.com). The other USB port (USB-A) can't be used to connect a computer, but can be used to attach USB devices such as a printer or an external hard disk, which can then be accessed from any of the attached computers (the hub uses the workgroup name BT).

If connected by Ethernet, you need to set both computers to use a dynamic IP address (this is the

default). The hub will then provide them with IP addresses in the same range. You need to run the networking wizard to enable file sharing across the local network.

We are not sure why you don't want the third computer to connect to the internet. By default, any device connected to the hub is able to access the internet, but can't be accessed from the internet unless you specifically tell the router to permit it. Normally, the firewall in the Home Hub blocks shared file folders from being accessed from outside your local network.

If you really want to block the computer from accessing the internet, first get it working on the network, then open a command prompt and type the command `ipconfig` to see the IP address assigned to it. Open Control Panel, Network Connections and select the connection you are using. Click Properties and then scroll down the list of components to Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) and click a second Properties button.

Here you can change the Properties for the network connection to use a fixed IP address. Set the IP address in the same range as the dynamic IP address that the router issued, but change the last number to a value between 200 and 250. For example, if the dynamic IP address reported by the `ipconfig` command was 192.168.0.2 then set an address such as 192.168.0.201. The subnet mask will be the same as reported by the `ipconfig` command (usually 255.255.255.0). Finally, we want to change the gateway address to 127.0.0.1. The gateway address is the address of the computer through which you will access the internet; 127.0.0.1 is a special IP address that refers to your own computer. By setting this value as the gateway, the computer won't be able to find a path to the internet.

```

C:\Windows\system32\cmd.exe
Ethernet adapter Local Area Connection:

    Connection-specific DNS Suffix  . : dennis.co.uk
    Link-local IPv6 Address . . . . . : fe80::10bf:ff92:d396:63ea%8
    IPv4 Address. . . . . : 10.105.0.63
    Subnet Mask . . . . . : 255.255.0.0
    Default Gateway . . . . . : 10.105.0.1

Tunnel adapter Local Area Connection* 6:

    Connection-specific DNS Suffix  . : dennis.co.uk
    Link-local IPv6 Address . . . . . : fe80::5efe:10.105.0.63%18
    Default Gateway . . . . . :

Tunnel adapter Local Area Connection* 7:

    Media State . . . . . : Media disconnected
    Connection-specific DNS Suffix  . :

Tunnel adapter Local Area Connection* 13:

    Media State . . . . . : Media disconnected
    Connection-specific DNS Suffix  . :

C:\Users\David>

```

◀ Check your network settings if you're having trouble with a network

Your experts

HELPFILE

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Paul Mullen

With 27 years of PC experience as a power user, programmer and IT consultant, Paul Mullen answers all PC problems, tackling hardware, system and security issues.



helpfile@computershopper.co.uk

SOFTWARE HELP 170

Kay Ewbank

Database developer and productivity expert Kay Ewbank offers help with office applications.



Ben Pitt

Professional musician and keen photographer Ben Pitt gives advice on using creative software.



softwarehelp@computershopper.co.uk

BUYING HELP

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Chris Finnamore

Labs Manager Chris Finnamore recommends the best products for your requirements.



buyinghelp@computershopper.co.uk

CONTACTS

Please contact the relevant department at the email address listed above. You can also write to us at:

Help
Computer Shopper
30 Cleveland Street
London
W1T 4JD

Please try to give full details of your problem. We need an email address or daytime and evening telephone numbers in case we need more information.

Although the policy of *Computer Shopper* is not to publish readers' email addresses, we include them in Help so that other readers with experience of similar problems can share their solution (please also cc any comments to the relevant Help department above). If you would prefer not to have your email address published, please say so.

Stop annoying security warnings

Q Can you tell me how to stop Windows' pop-up warning about having the firewall turned off in Windows XP?

Alan Malby, alan.malby@yahoo.co.uk

A If you install a third-party firewall in place of the Windows Firewall, it should have identified itself to Windows Security Center and you should not be getting this warning. Perhaps you need to update your firewall software to a version that is compatible with Windows XP Service Pack 2 (SP2). On one of our computers, the Windows Firewall is turned off because ZoneAlarm is installed, but

Windows Security Center says the firewall is on. When we look at the details, it says ZoneAlarm is running.

If you don't have another firewall, we strongly advise against disabling the Windows Firewall. If you must disable the warning, go to Control Panel, Security Center then, on the left under Resources, you will see the 'Change the way Security Center alerts me' option. Click this and you can disable the warning.

Bear in mind that if you do this, many anti-spyware programs will warn you about a dangerous Registry entry (the one disabling the warning) and may turn the warning back on. These warnings can be turned off by a Trojan.

Am I using WiFi illegally?

Q I was a little alarmed to see your article about a man being arrested for stealing a wireless connection (*News, Shopper 237*). I run a PC and occasionally a laptop plugged into a router/hub. I recently visited my son, and when I booted my laptop I was intrigued to see AVG Free updating itself. I told my son that my machine had logged on to his wireless network, but he told me he hadn't got one.

AVG had logged itself on to someone else's network and downloaded its update files from across the road. I never use my wireless capability and don't know how to turn it off, and I consider AVG too important to take it off my machine. I wonder what the law would make of this situation?

Colin Walker, colin@collywobbles.f2s.com

A We don't think you should be too alarmed. There are thousands of people using open wireless networks that don't belong to them every day, often by accident. Only one person has been arrested for it as far as we know, and that was because he was brazenly sitting outside a building with his laptop. The police probably thought he was deliberately spying on the company.

In most cases, the owner of the network will never know someone else is using their

network. Even if they did see an unknown computer connected, how would they know where to find it? And if they were concerned about other people using their wireless network, they would have secured it. We're not lawyers, but if you accidentally connected to a wireless network and used it without knowing, we don't think you'd get into trouble. To be on the safe side, though, you should stop your laptop from automatically connecting to wireless networks.

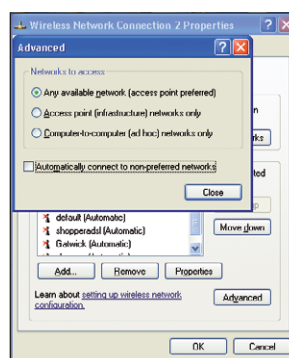
In your case, it wasn't AVG that connected to someone else's network, it was your computer. If you're using Windows XP, it can be set to connect to an unsecured network automatically. To turn off this feature, open the Control Panel and select Network Connections. Right-click your wireless connection (called Wireless Network Connection 1, or similar) and select Properties. Click on Wireless Networks and click the Advanced button. Untick the 'Automatically connect to non-preferred networks' option and click Close. Windows Vista doesn't have this option, so you're always asked before connecting to a network.

However, if you're not using Windows' built-in wireless management, you may find that third-party software is automatically trying to connect to any network. You'll need to check its instructions in order to turn this mode off.

In any case, if you rarely use wireless you should turn it off completely, if only to conserve battery life. If you use your laptop on a plane, you need to turn it off, as airlines claim it could interfere with aircraft navigation equipment. Many laptops have a tiny switch somewhere on the outside that turns off wireless. Often owners

don't know where the switch is. We often see "problems with wireless" that are due to the switch being accidentally knocked into the off position. Other computers use a key combination; on many Dell computers it is Fn-F2. In other cases the manufacturer's wireless utility, if installed, can be used to turn off wireless.

Finally, you can also go to Control Panel, System and then Device Manager and disable the wireless driver; this does not turn off the wireless card but it will prevent it connecting accidentally.



▲ Stop your computer from automatically connecting to wireless networks

Why is my PC so slow?

Q My wife's computer seems to be dying and I can't fix it. It's a five-year-old Athlon XP2200+, with a GeForce 4 Ultra TI 4600 graphics card, Creative SB Audigy Sound Card, 1GB of RAM, DVD writer and Windows XP Home Edition. The computer has been very reliable, but of late it has been getting slower and slower until it stops. Task Manager shows CPU usage of between 98 to 100 per cent.

The computer has a firewall, anti-virus and WinCleaner, and is scanned regularly. I can't find anything that is using this huge amount of processor utilisation, so I have gone back to basics: ie, format and reinstall. It's OK for a few hours, but then the problems return.

I've reinstalled Windows three times, and the last time I didn't install any other applications – just a plain install plus a Belkin wireless adaptor for the internet. The same result occurred. Is the processor packing up, and can I check this somehow?

Roy Henwood,
royhenwood@ntlworld.com

A It is often wise to format a computer that has been used for a few years and has got slow. If there's no improvement in performance after reformatting, clearly the problem lies elsewhere, and you may be simply reinstalling the problem each time.

However, this does not seem to fit the pattern of a hardware problem. Unless the processor was overheating and throttling back

its speed, a faulty processor or other hardware would not explain the sudden jump to 100 per cent CPU utilisation. The fact that the processor is running at a high utilisation rules out a faulty hard disk as the cause of the slowdown.

To investigate further, we need to look at which processes are using the processor so much. Press Ctrl-Alt-Del, which should bring up Task Manager. Click on the Processes tab and click twice on the CPU column header to sort the list with the biggest processor users at the top. By looking at which processes (apart from system idle process) use a lot of CPU time, we can get a clue to the cause.

If the processor hogs are shown as Rundll or Svchost, we'll need more detailed information. These are both used to load a particular dll library file or a service. To find out what is using the CPU time, we need the name of the file it is loading. Download Process Explorer from www.microsoft.com/technet/sysinternals. Extract this to its own directory and then run it.

The Task Manager screenshot you sent was peculiar, with five processes each using 20 per cent of CPU time: Explorer, System, AvgW, MsASCUi and MsMpEng. The last two processes are parts of Windows Defender or Microsoft One Care. AvgW is the main portion of AVG Anti-virus, while Explorer and System are normal system processes. This suggests that scanning for viruses or spyware is slowing this system down.

We advise readers with slow systems first to run the Disk Clean-Up wizard and then Disk Defragmenter. You will find both of these under Programs, Accessories, System Tools. Often

getting rid of a clutter of temporary files and defragmenting your other files makes a world of difference in performance. This should not be a problem with a brand-new installation of Windows, although the startup files optimisation performed by Disk Defragmenter may help.

Everything points to a problem with your security software. Quite a few people have had problems with Windows Defender or Microsoft One Care taking excessive processor time. In some cases the problems have been traced to third-party applications, and commonly it is a result of a conflict between different anti-virus or anti-spyware programs running on the system. Left-over traces of previous anti-virus software can cause this, although reformatting would eliminate this problem in your case.

Run HijackThis (www.trendsecure.com) to determine what is running on your system. This does not tell us what application each entry belongs to, so you must do some investigating to determine what you need and what you don't. You should have only one anti-spyware and one anti-virus program running. Even then, conflicts can arise if they are from different manufacturers.

Any security software will slow down the system, and this will be most apparent on systems with a slow processors or limited memory. Still, an Athlon XP 2200+ processor and 1GB of RAM should be fine.

If all seems normal, try uninstalling Windows Defender. Sometimes it is enough to uninstall it and install the latest version. In other cases, delays return when you reinstall, and you may have to use a different anti-spyware program.

Writing a batch file

Q I need help writing a batch file. I have to set up around 15 Tills (PCs running Windows XP Embedded) every week. This takes me most of the day. I have created a batch file to copy the files I need off a memory stick and set up the TCP/IP settings. However, I need a lot more out of it. I want to set the Guest account as active and not denied access to machines, disable automatic updates, change the display colour quality to 16-bit, take off the security alerts, disable the firewall, change the computer name to TILL1, and share the C: drive with full access to everyone.

At the moment, I am doing all this via the Control Panel on each machine. It would make my life easier if this could be done via batch files. I have tried writing scripts for some of this, but for some reason this does not work on Microsoft Windows Embedded for Point of Service (WEPOS).

Daniel Evans, danfonz@sky.com

A We are assuming that the manufacturer had installed Embedded already and that you don't have access to the Target Designer tool which is used to build the runtime disk image. Otherwise, it would be simple to make these changes before creating an image.

There are several different ways to make the changes you want. We're not experts in Windows Embedded and don't have space or time to describe all the details, so you will have to do your own research, but we can describe some methods to get you started. Scripting just automates the commands you would perform to do the task through Control Panel and often there are more direct methods to achieve the same objective.

To use scripting, you will have to edit the Registry to fix a bug in the installation of Windows Script Host service on Windows XP Embedded; a parameter was missed off the commands defined in the Registry that run scripts. One fix for this bug was incorporated into SP2, but it didn't take into account any problems running scripts from a folder with a space in its name, such as Program Files. A blog article at <http://blogs.msdn.com/embedded/archive/2007/04/17/a-small-percentage-of-error.aspx> explains how to edit the Registry to fix this bug.

REGISTRY DO

Since most system changes are stored as values in the Windows Registry, the simplest and most direct way to make many changes is to create a Registry Settings file (a text file with extension .reg). When you click on a .reg file, the settings are imported into the Registry. To create such a file, you should make the changes on one system then export the relevant Registry keys. The tricky part is finding the keys you need to change.

Many useful keys are described in the Windows Embedded team blog at <http://blogs.msdn.com/embedded/> (just search for Registry). If the key you want is not mentioned there, most Registry keys in Embedded are the same as other versions of Windows XP, so a little Googling should find most of them.

For example, to disable the Windows Firewall, open RegEdit and look under HKLM/System/CurrentControlSet/Services/SharedAccess/Parameters/FirewallPolicy/StandardProfile. In the right-hand window, look for a value called EnableFirewall (if it does not exist, create a Dword value) and set its value to zero. Disabling the firewall in standard versions of Windows XP SP2 brings up a warning message from Windows

Security Center, so you have to disable that warning, too (another Registry key). Disabling Windows Security Center warnings may in turn trigger warnings from anti-virus or anti-spyware software. Once you have modified the keys and tested your changes, you can export each key using the Export option from the Registry menu, then combine the resulting .reg files.

Similarly, the official way to disable automatic updates is to go to Registry key HKey_Local_Machine/Software/Policies/Microsoft/Windows/WindowsUpdate/AU and create a new Dword value NoAutoUpdate and set its value to 1. A second method is to use the Group Policy Editor, specifically designed for system administrators to make the same policy changes on many different systems. This is widely used for corporate networks with Windows XP Professional, but in Embedded your system provider may have chosen not to include the tool gpedit.msc in your run-time system image. If Gpedit is available, Microsoft has lots of documentation on how to use it.

Several command-line tools can be used in a batch file. Some of these come as standard with Windows, while others are part of the Windows XP Resource Kit. Particularly important commands include NET, NETSH, NETSVC, SC and WMIC. For example, NET SHARE can be used to create a new network share. NETSH is a very powerful (and complex) scripting utility for network configuration, NETSVC can be used to start or stop services, but to change the startup setting to disabled (and this may be the best way to tackle some tasks) you need to use SC from the Resource Kit. WMIC is a command-line utility that can do almost anything that you can do using Windows Management Interface (Admin Tools in Control Panel), but it is even more complex, so look for examples online.

Replacing a laptop's DVD drive

Q I have had my Dell Inspiron 6400 for about a year now, and everything was fine. The laptop was recently dropped accidentally by someone while the optical drive (DVD-RW) was open. Not surprisingly, the drive split in two and is irreparable. Accidental damage is not covered by my warranty, which in any case expired the previous day, and I have no idea what to do. I use my optical drive frequently for backups and gaming, and certain applications only run from said drive.

It's a Phillips DVD +/- SDVD8820. I ran a Google search and found that it's available on eBay. I'm reluctant to buy from eBay, but from the looks of it, it's the only place I can find it. I would be grateful if you could offer any advice.

A Fitton, sohdiia@aston.ac.uk

A You can order a brand new drive from Dell (curiously only by phone, as parts cannot be ordered through its website), but it won't be the cheapest source. For cheaper replacements, look in

Device Manager and get the make and model number of the DVD-RW drive, then search for that. Since the same drive may have been used with a different outer plastic faceplate in different models, you may need to use the plastic faceplate from your existing drive, but these generally unclip easily.

For easier replacement, get the exact Dell part number for the drive. Often this is shown if you go to <http://support.dell.com> and enter your service tag, then select original configuration, or it may be printed on the drive label.

The drive should not be hard to find, as the same drive was used in many Inspiron models, including the 6000, 6400, 9200, 9300, E1405 and E1505. Replacements are likely to cost around £30. If you are not comfortable dismantling your computer, you should take it to a local repair shop.

Alternatively, if you don't use your drive much on the move, you could just buy a USB DVD writer, as reviewed in last month's *Labs*. Desktop drives are the cheapest and quickest, because they use regular PC drives in an external case. If you want something that you can carry



▲ A portable USB DVD writer is a good replacement for an internal laptop drive if you don't want to take your computer apart

around with you, you'll need a portable drive, which houses a laptop-sized DVD writer in an external case. Portable drives aren't as quick as their desktop equivalents and they typically run slower when powered just by USB. For the best results, you also need to connect a power adaptor if supplied.

Last month's *Labs* will tell you which drives are the best for your needs. LG's GSA-E50N was the best portable drive and costs £54 including VAT. Samsung's Super-WriteMaster SE-S204 was the best desktop external drive and costs £47 including VAT.

Trial version of Windows XP expiring

Q My son got hold of a 120-day trial of Windows XP Professional (100 per cent legal). It is due to run out some time soon, so I decided to contact Microsoft to ask how I can find out the expiry date. I was told that Microsoft could not help me because the software is pirated. I explained that this is an authorised official copy issued by Microsoft, and that my son is getting full upgrades from them, but Microsoft would only admit to a trial version of the 64-bit Windows. However, when my son downloaded it, he was given the option of 32-bit or 64-bit, and he downloaded the 32-bit version of Windows XP Professional Edition.

How can I find the expiry date? I know you can type something into the Run box, but I have forgotten what it is. Can you help? I need to get him another (full) copy, but

only when this one has run out. Can the full version be written over the trial without us having to do a clean install? I have heard you can actually change the product code to the new one. Is this so?

Steve Matthews, Matthews2428@aol.com

A Officially, the only trial version of Windows XP is the 120-day trial of the 64-bit version of Windows XP Professional. The x64-bit trial can be downloaded from Microsoft's website (www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/64bit/facts/trial.msp).

We are not surprised that Microsoft's support would not believe that you had downloaded a 32-bit trial from Microsoft. We just tested the process for ordering the trial version and the download link is now definitely just the 64-bit version. There must have been a bug that resulted in your getting

the 32-bit version, as it was never officially offered as a trial.

If you click Start, Run and type in Winver and click OK, it should tell you the expiry date.

Once the trial period is nearly up, you can buy the Upgrade version of Windows XP Professional (cheaper than the full version) and install this to remove the expiry date. Hurry, as we are not sure how much longer Microsoft will allow this to be sold. You could also upgrade to Vista Business or Ultimate. You cannot 'upgrade' to Home versions of XP or Vista, but would have to do a clean install from the full version.

When you get a legal licence, assuming it is for Windows XP Professional, experiment using Magical Jellybean Keyfinder to see if it will let you enter the new product key without reinstalling. It is impossible to say if this will remove the trial expiry date. It might still need at least a repair install, and perhaps a clean install.

Laptop's wireless networking doesn't work

Q My HP Pavilion dv6000 (model 6131eu) laptop has lost its wireless capability. The wireless switch is inoperable and the status light is constantly orange. HP's Wireless Assistant has disappeared, and Windows Vista doesn't recognise the Broadcom wireless card.

I'm a fairly experienced user and used another computer to access HP's user forums about the problem. It's a horror story. Apparently many HP Pavilions across the model range are developing this fault between six and 10 months and, for some unlucky owners, after the 12-month warranty period. HP Total Care answered my email as follows:

"We would like to share that we have come across this issue with many of our customers regarding the wireless card. This issue could be due to corrupted settings in the BIOS, which might not be recognising the wireless card, or hardware malfunctioning with the system board. To confirm the same, we recommend you download and install the BIOS update."

The problem affects "many" (Total Care's words) customers. There doesn't seem to be one 'fix' to cure it, either. Some of the users who have had their motherboard changed, BIOS updated and card replaced in the early days of this fault are reporting that the wireless has once again failed. There is a great deal of pleading for a fix from users on HP's own forum.

I have not seen anything about this in *Computer Shopper* and wonder if you know about this problem, and what HP intends to do about it? If it knows about this problem, and clearly it does, why is it still shipping laptops it knows are likely to become faulty within a year or so? Why are retailers not warning their customers about this fault?

Do we really want to load our machines with all kinds of files, only for them to have to be shipped to HP for a fault to be fixed

with who-knows-what consequences? I shall be contacting my retailer, Staples, in due course, although it claims to know nothing about this problem.

Are you able to shed any light on this awful situation and bring some pressure on HP for a general warning or recall? It seems to me that anyone buying one of these laptops should be warned of the horrors that lie ahead.

Ken Hyde, k@hyde7446.fslife.co.uk

A All laptop manufacturers have some pretty reliable models and some really badly designed and built ones. In general, problems are more likely to arise in the cheaper consumer-quality laptops, which are sold for the lowest possible price, and less likely in the better-built business models. HP has always offered a fairly impressive specification for not too much money in the dv series laptops, but several problems have been evident.

FEELING THE HEAT

The dv7000 series suffered from overheating issues and troubles with its graphics processor, so much so that after a class action lawsuit in the USA, HP started replacing motherboards or giving a free replacement system to users with those problems, even when out of warranty. Unfortunately, the replacement systems those customers received, the dv8000 series, proved just as unreliable. So now the dv8000 has been replaced by the dv9000, and the dv6000, sharing many components, has been brought out alongside it. We're not surprised to hear they are having problems. Apart from the wireless issue you describe, there are also frequent problems with the power and battery charging circuitry.

Yes, the more-aware dealers do know about these problems and, as a result, some no longer carry these computers. HP's response indicates



▲ HP's Pavilion dv6000 has known wireless issues. Until HP creates a fix that works, a USB wireless adaptor is the best solution for those with a laptop out of warranty

that it knows about the problem, despite public statements to the contrary, yet it continues to suggest that it is due to a corrupted BIOS, which seems unlikely.

The problem affects both dv6000 and dv9000 systems. Our take is that BIOS updates, reloading the operating system, and replacing the wireless card are unlikely to fix the problem. But HP would like you to try these inexpensive fixes first. In most cases, a motherboard replacement is needed. Clearly there is a design problem with these motherboards. Until HP admits it, and replaces them with a redesigned motherboard, it may be best for out-of-warranty customers to buy a USB wireless adaptor.

Spyware has slowed down my system

Q After picking up some spyware, my PC is running very slowly even though I seem to have removed the spyware. I downloaded HijackThis and attach the log file it produced. Any ideas?

Steve Wood,
steve@crazycottage.demon.co.uk

A We are not surprised that your PC is slow. From the HijackThis log that you sent, it looks like you have the following running: Norton Internet Security, AVG Anti-Spyware 7.5, Microsoft SQL Server (which comes with some versions of Office), Spyware Doctor, Spybot Search & Destroy, TeaTimer and Copernic Desktop Search.

To avoid slowdowns, you should run only one real-time anti-virus and one real-time anti-spyware utility, although it is OK and advisable to run occasional scans with different anti-spyware programs. In addition, certain manufacturers now offer a single combined anti-virus and anti-spyware utility, such as AVG's Anti-Malware.

Microsoft SQL Server is needed to use the Business Contacts Manager in recent versions of Outlook, but does tend to slow a computer down unless it has lots of memory. Almost any desktop search utility, whether from Copernic, Google or MSN, also has an impact on speed, so consider how useful it is to you.

You also have startup or launcher applications for the following, each of which has only a small effect, but it can all mount up: Acrobat Reader, BounceBack Express, Epson printer drivers, Google Toolbar Notifier, HP Digital Imaging, HP Business Inkjet Toolbox, HP Photosmart, HP Software Update, InstallShield UpdateService, Java Updater, Microsoft IntelliType Pro, Microsoft IntelliPoint, MS

Messenger, Nokia PC Sync, Nvidia MediaCenter, pdfFactory Pro, Photoshop Album Starter Edition, Plaxo Helper, Quicktime taskbar, Sony Picture Utility and Star Office.

Lots of programs add startup applications when you install them. In most cases, these are not essential; you can start the application just when you need it. Not only do they slow down Windows startup, but they also occupy memory that other applications could be using. Use Msconfig (click Start, Run and type in msconfig) to turn off those you don't use frequently.

Your web browser is slowed down by lots of Browser Helper Objects (BHOs). Consider whether you need the BHOs from Google, Yahoo!, Adobe, Copernic, Spybot S&D, Java and Norton.

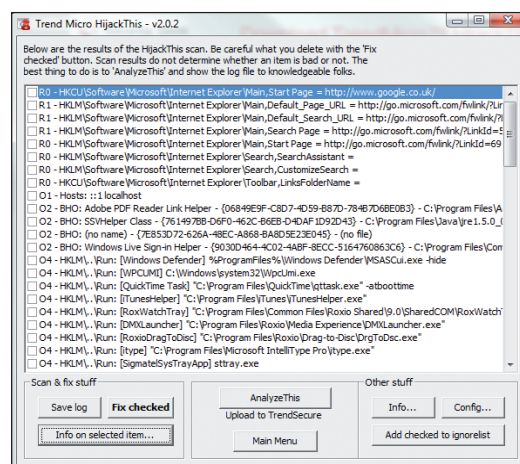
The spyware may have installed a rootkit, concealing other running applications from the HijackThis log. To detect these, try running HijackThis in Safe Mode or run a rootkit detector such as the one from SysInternals.com (part of Microsoft) or AVG (<http://free.grisoft.com>). We recommend running anti-spyware scans in Safe Mode to detect hidden files and make removal easier.

SPY CATCHER

Finally, the anti-spyware software may not have detected all the changes made by spyware (which is why we recommend scanning with several utilities) or the spyware may have made changes to essential Windows files such as Wininet.dll. Somehow the spyware has managed to get round the Windows File Protection feature of Windows XP. Often anti-virus or anti-spyware software can detect the change but may be unable to remove it.

If it deletes or quarantines the infected file without replacing it with a clean copy, your internet connection won't work. If you have a proper Windows XP Setup CD, you may want to do a repair install of Windows, then run Windows Update to replace all the updates the repair install overwrites. If not, you can run System File Checker (SFC) to look for changed files, but unless you have a Windows XP Setup CD it won't replace changed files automatically, and you will have to search for the correct version of any changed files.

Advanced users should use SysInternals Process Explorer to see what processes are using your processor the most. You can also press Ctrl-Alt-Del and check the Processes tab of Task Manager (click twice on the CPU column header to sort by the most demanding processes), but Process Explorer gives more detail.



▲ HijackThis can help you track down what's causing your PC to run slowly

How do I get rid of Flash?

Q I have a 450MHz PC running Windows 98 SE and my ISP is CompuServe. Rather foolishly, after being nagged innumerable times, I decided to download Flash, which is very pretty but has slowed my computer down to a crawl when I access sites that use it.

The Windows Add/Remove Programs will not remove it, and I have also tried deleting the FlashPlayer folder, but it just seems to reinstall itself and comes back like a bad penny. How do I get rid of it?

Harold Eckersall, via email

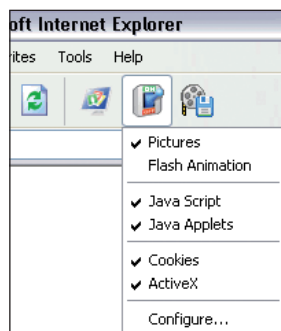
A While Flash is sometimes useful and fun, often the size of Flash downloads is annoying, especially when they are those irritating advertisements that jump up to get your attention. Flash Player installs several components and it makes all kinds of system alterations and so it cannot simply be deleted. One of its components is an update checker, which is probably what is replacing the program each time you delete it.

Unfortunately it seems that Adobe, which now owns Flash, decided to ignore all the rules of Windows programming and did not distribute the uninstaller with its Flash Player. You have to download it from <http://tinyurl.com/2wwfes>.

We suggest you leave Flash installed, as there are some great sites that work only with Flash, but disable it except when you need it. For example, you can view some of the Flash movies at www.flashportal.com, especially the Animation v Animator cartoons, which will please any user irritated by intrusive Flash adverts. Advertisers use Flash to produce exceedingly annoying and intrusive adverts, so one solution is to use an ad-blocker. We use Firefox 2 (www.firefox.com), which has a useful free extension called Ad Block Plus (<http://addons.mozilla.com>). Each time we see an annoying Flash advert then that advert and all others from the same

server get blocked. There are also several good ad blockers for Internet Explorer, but you will need to pay for them. For example, Ads Gone from A1 Tech (www.adsgone.com) costs \$30 (around £15) after a 30-day free trial period.

Alternatively, you could try turning off Flash except when you want it. There is an extension for Firefox called FlashBlock. IE users (including users of AOL and CompuServe browsers, which is built using IE components) will have to load a couple of Registry Setting files to disable and re-enable Flash (http://johnhaller.com/jh/useful_stuff/disable_flash.asp). There is also a free IE add-in called Flash and Pics Control (<http://tinyurl.com/2yjalw>) that adds an icon to the IE toolbar to disable Flash. It can disable JavaScript and even pictures if you are using a very slow internet connection. It won't work with AOL or CompuServe browsers, though. ☹



▲ If you find Flash annoying for adverts, Flash and Pics Control can help you disable it quickly